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Memorandum for:

The attached paper on Catholicism in Eastern Europe was requested by the NIO/Europe. It was prepared by various analysts in the East European Division.

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4 March 1986

EUR A

**Office of European Analysis
Directorate of Intelligence**

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Catholicism in Eastern Europe

Except in Albania where all religious practice has been eliminated the Roman Catholic Church has survived the establishment of Marxist societies in Eastern Europe. In recent years, and particularly since the appointment of a Polish Pope, there have even been signs of a revival of Catholicism in the region. While no country seems close to developing the same level of religious intensity that exists in Poland -- where crucifixes hang in some state schools -- East European and Soviet authorities are worried about the attraction of religion, particularly among the youth [REDACTED]

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While the Vatican is pleased with this trend it recognizes that much more needs to be done to secure genuine religious rights in Eastern Europe. There is a shortage of priests and churches and most of the regimes insist on participating in the selection of new clerics. The Pope has been pressing hard to correct these inequities and would like to visit several East European countries in addition to another planned trip to Poland in 1987 [REDACTED]

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Catholicism and the East European Marxist states are likely to maintain an uneasy coexistence. The governments need stable societies in order to prosper, and the Church needs state support to function; neither wants to create conditions that would prompt Soviet intervention. Whatever the outcome, the practice of religion has demonstrated the limitations of state power in Eastern Europe for over 40 years and the yearnings of the people for a spiritual life to fill the vacuum created by Marxist atheism. [REDACTED]

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[redacted]

The Pope continues to keep well-informed on events in Poland through a constant stream of visits by both clerics and lay people to Rome. Nevertheless, it seems clear that he recognizes Cardinal Glemp as the man who has to fight the battles with the Polish authorities and leaves most of the tactical decisions to him. [redacted]

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[redacted] the Pope [redacted]
[redacted] appears to favor constructive engagement with the Jaruzelski regime, but is unwilling to extend diplomatic relations until the regime goes ahead with legislation giving the Church a legal status in the country.

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[redacted] In the meantime, he has strongly supported the Church's efforts to expand its activities into various social-cultural activities to substitute for discredited state institutions. The Pope endorsed the Church's effort to create an internationally financed fund to aid private agriculture and, on balance, believes that US sanctions have lost much of their efficiency. [redacted]

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The Polish authorities have reportedly already given their approval for the visit [redacted]

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[redacted] The Pope would clearly like to visit Gdansk and other reported Solidarity strongholds, but the authorities are adamantly opposed, fearing that a visit would stir up the workers. [redacted]

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[redacted] the Pope [redacted] is prepared to receive Jaruzelski in Rome in the near future. In recent weeks Jaruzelski has been angling for an invitation to Rome to further increase his international legitimacy. The stumbling block apparently is the willingness of Italian Prime Minister Craxi to receive him. The prospects for such a visit remain unclear since the Italians stipulated that three prominent political prisoners be released and the Polish regime responded by only reducing marginally the sentences of two. [redacted]

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The Czechoslovak regime's tight controls over the activities of the Catholic Church are a matter of continuing

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[redacted]

concern to the Vatican and have contributed to very contentious relations between Rome and Prague. The government's restrictive policy reflects its concern that the Church could become a haven for anti-regime activity similar to neighboring Poland. Government control of the Catholic Church includes state licensing and payment of priests and required state approval of ordinations. [redacted]

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The Czechoslovak Catholic Church, which claims 11 million followers out of a population of 15 million, has experienced a revival of popular support in recent years. The most recent manifestation of this sentiment occurred at the town of Velehrad in July 1985 when over 100,000 attended the 1100th anniversary of the burial nearby of St. Methodius, who is credited with bringing Christianity to the Slavs. The generally young crowd that attended loudly objected to attempts by government representatives to focus the celebration on secular terms. Vatican State Secretary for Foreign Affairs Cardinal Casaroli was received enthusiastically and expressed the desire that the Pope would be able to visit Czechoslovakia.

Ten of the 13 Czechoslovak bishoprics and two archbishoprics are currently vacant. The Vatican refuses to accept candidates from among the approximately 500 priests in the pro-government "Pacem in Terris" organization, and the government will not consider candidates from among the remaining 2600 priests in Czechoslovakia. Cardinal Casaroli's consultations with government leaders last summer after the Velehrad celebrations produced no solutions. [redacted]

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The Vatican's greatest concern for the future of the Czechoslovak church is finding a successor for Cardinal Tomasek who is 86 and ailing. Tomasek has been a fairly cautious leader of the Catholic Church although even his limited outspokenness has led the government to isolate and criticize him. Government nominees to succeed Tomasek --

[redacted] would be pro-government "Pacem in Terris" supporters that would present the Vatican with the same problem it has experienced with the Czechoslovak bishoprics. [redacted]

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The Vatican's relations with Hungary are comparatively good. Religious practice is not rigorously interfered with and the Catholic Church has its own newspaper, although it is subject to the same sort of ill-defined censorship as all Hungarian publications. The Hungarian Catholic Church claims 6 million adherents out of a total population of 10.7 million. [redacted]

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At times the Vatican appears uneasy with the relatively cozy church-state relationship in Hungary. [redacted]

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[REDACTED]

Some of the Hungarian faithful agree and a minority have formed the so-called Base Communities of Catholics, who object to following both the dictates of the Church hierarchy and some of the regime's policies. In particular, the Communities' advocacy of conscientious objection to military service has strained the church-state relationship. The regime has tried to defuse the situation by quietly allowing Catholic conscientious objectors to perform alternate civilian service, and the Vatican, which does not want a confrontation that might undermine the progress made by the Hungarian Church, has enjoined the dissidents to obey their ecclesiastical superiors. [REDACTED]

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The Pope received East German leader Honecker during the latter's official visit to Italy in April 1985, but the visit has not led to improvements in church-state relations. According to US Embassy sources, the Pope has been urging Cardinal Meisner to modify the German Church's traditional policy of keeping the government at arm's length and rather to adopt, at least in some degree the Protestant Church's policy of political engagement. There is little evidence that Meisner has moved in this direction. The Catholic Church in East Germany is a small minority -- 1.5 million in a population of almost 17 million. [REDACTED]

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The rise in recent years of public concern in East Germany over "peace" issues has strained traditional Catholic detachment. In January 1983, after journalistic criticism of their stance from abroad and reportedly after Papal urging, the East German bishops issued a pastoral letter on world peace that challenged several regime positions. Days later, Pope John Paul II announced that the leading East German bishop, Meisner, would be made a cardinal. The pastoral letter was not followed, however, by any noticeable change in relations between the church and the regime, and, [REDACTED] the traditional arm's-length posture still has strong appeal in the East German Catholic hierarchy. [REDACTED]

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The position of the Roman Catholic Church in Romania is surprisingly good, in view of the Ceausescu regime's extremely restrictive policy toward religion in general, its

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brutally repressive approach toward fundamentalist Protestant believers, and the close identification of the Catholic Church with the country's beleaguered Hungarian and German minorities. The Vatican desk officer for Romania told U.S. diplomats last year that in many ways the Catholic Church encountered less pressure from the Ceausescu regime than it did elsewhere in Eastern Europe. [REDACTED]

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The Vatican nevertheless has a number of concerns. Chief among them is the plight of the Uniate, or Greek Catholic Church (which practices the Eastern rite but communes with Rome), officially suppressed and annexed to the Orthodox Church in 1948. The Uniate Church, centered in Transylvania, had about 1.6 million adherents (almost entirely ethnic Romanian) and was the second most influential Church in the country prior to its dissolution. It continues to function underground with a network of secretly ordained priests and claims some 500,000 to 700,000 adherents. The Pope celebrated a mass for one of the Uniate Church's underground bishops upon learning of his death last year, thereby conveying his continuing interest in the fate of the Uniates. [REDACTED]

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Other major Vatican concerns are the regime's refusal since 1949 to recognize four of the Catholic Church's six dioceses and the lack of an official statute regularizing the Catholic Church's status. Negotiations for a statute have been going on between Bucharest and the Vatican for several years. Agreement seemed near in 1978, but the regime has been dragging its feet since then, possibly in reaction to the election of Pope John Paul II and his association with the rise of Solidarity in Poland. [REDACTED]

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A final issue of concern is the regime's discrimination against the country's sizable (nearly two million) Hungarian minority, the majority of whom are Roman Catholic. These concerns reached a high point in 1984 because of the alleged beating death of an ethnic Hungarian Roman Catholic priest at the hands of the security authorities. The issue has never been resolved conclusively, and Vatican sources appear split on whether the regime was at fault. [REDACTED]

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Yugoslavia is the only East European country that has diplomatic relations with the Vatican, and the Pope as recently as last December expressed an interest in paying it a visit. But bilateral relations remain cool, and the prospects for an improvement, or a papal visit, look dim for the near future. [REDACTED]

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The main sticking point to better Belgrade-Vatican ties, and a papal visit, is deep-seated friction between church and state in Croatia, one of Yugoslavia's six constituent republics. As in Poland, the Communist Croatian authorities fear the Croatian Church for its longstanding role as a defender of Croat nationhood. They attack it for its collaboration during World War II with the fascist regime installed by the Nazis. Croatia's ideologically alienated youth nonetheless flock to church events in record numbers. Church-state relations are much better in the less doctrinaire liberal northerly Republic of Slovenia. Catholics make up nearly one-third of the country's 23 million people, the others being mainly Orthodox or Muslim.

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Pope John Paul is worried about the survival of the Church in Bulgaria where less than one percent of the population is Roman Catholic. The training of new priests is a major problem for the Church, since there is no seminary in Bulgaria. Although the government claims that it would allow some priests to go to Rome to study, the number of new vocations is low and most priests are elderly. Sofia and the Vatican have not been able to agree on the appointment of a new bishop to Plovdiv. The Bulgarian government rejected the Vatican's nomination in 1984.

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In recent years -- especially since the charges of Bulgarian complicity in the assassination attempt -- the Bulgarian government has actively sought to project a facade of better relations with the Vatican. Before the Antonov trial began last May, the regime sent a delegation to Rome in connection with the anniversary of Saints Cyril and Methodius.

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Before World War II, ten percent of the Albanian population was Roman Catholic, with roots back to the first missionary campaigns of the Apostles. Hundreds of clergymen were jailed, expelled, or executed in the first decade after

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[redacted]

the war. The Catholic Church seemed to suffer the most, apparently because of its foreign links, and was forced to break with the Vatican. In 1967 organized religion was outlawed altogether and Albania proclaimed the establishment of "the world's first atheistic state." [redacted]

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The Pope on a number of occasions during the past few years has publicly criticized Albanian religious persecution. In return, Tirane censors all references to the Pope from Italian TV programs, which are rebroadcast otherwise untouched to the domestic audience. Prospects for improved conditions for the country's Catholic minority are slim under the regime of Ramiz Alia that came to power almost a year ago. [redacted]

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SUBJECT: Catholicism in Eastern Europe

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